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# Socio-Economic Situation of Kosovan Migrants before and after Migration

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**Abstract.** In the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, Kosovan society faced numerous social, economic, and political problems. These problems became the main cause of the high rate of migration. Many citizens, especially young people, were forced to migrate to European countries and beyond in the absence of prospects in Kosovo. Unemployed and employed people migrated in search of a better life. Migration from Kosovo continues to be high to this day. Countries like Germany began issuing work visas to Kosovans after 2005, leading many young people to migrate to Germany.

To understand the situation of Kosovan migrants before and after migration, the study (N = 350) aimed to investigate the situation of unemployment, employment, and satisfaction with pre- and post-migration earnings. The results show that around 75% of Kosovan migrants were unemployed before migrating and about 50% of those who were employed had low monthly incomes (up to 200 euros), while in the host society this situation has changed positively. The results indicate that, after the migration to the host society, about 85 % of Kosovan migrants are employed, over 50% have high incomes (around 2000 euros), and about one-third have changed their post-migration occupation.

**Keywords:** migration; Kosovo; situation; social; economic.

## INTRODUCTION

Migration is often associated with occupational downgrading. Authors [10, 21] found such a pattern of downgrading for Australia, as did [2, 3] for the US. For European countries, authors [24] showed for Spain, in their Institute for the Study of Labor discussion paper, that the downgrading hypothesis could be supported for migrants from different origins, including those who were free to move from Eastern Europe. In Germany, authors [4] published the Institute for the Study of Labor paper on ethnic German migrants' downward labour market mobility in the 1990. By the 1990, Kosovan migration focused on the male-dominated labour force, consisting mainly of male heads of households, young people, and low-skilled people. Most of the migrants were unemployed, which means that they were persons who were not in employment before they emigrated, were unskilled, or were farmers of private agricultural economies. It has been well established in the literature on migration that the economic outlook in the country of origin is a relevant push

factor for migrants, while the economic outlook in the destination country is an important pull factor [6, 7]. Although this economic approach does not take into account chain migration, it nevertheless indicates the crucial role played by the labor market in understanding the processes of international migration. After the group of Kosovan 'unemployed' migrants comes the skilled workforce (11.5 %): these are the workers who qualified before moving abroad as craftsmen, metalworkers, construction workers, miners, and so on, referring to the group of secondary sector activities in which they are employed in the host societies [18].

The low-skilled composition of the migrants has led most of them to work hard in the destination country and to have a heavy life (far from the standards of the host country) full of difficulties, especially regarding the nature of integration into and adaptation to the new social circle. The difficult life of Kosovan migrants has been driven by two main factors: their lack of qualifications, which made it difficult to adapt to and integrate

into the host society and thus attain a better job and life and, on the other hand, the need to save money to be sent to the country of origin to help their family in Kosovo. This difficult situation for Kosovan migrants began to improve after 2000. Migration in earlier periods (before 2000) was characterized by male dominance, as in the past migration was more oriented towards the male workforce. Thus, the gender ratio of migration was approximately even after 2000, while in recent years' women have dominated migration: 52.94 % female and 47.06 % male [20]. The average age of Kosovan migrants is 28 years, which is younger than the average Kosovo resident population (31 years). Migration with the family has also led to a positive change in the way of life for Kosovan migrants in the host country in terms of social and systemic integration [17]. Improving vocational training and spending years in the host society have enabled Kosovan migrants to be more and more accepted and integrated. Most of the Kosovan migrants in the more recent period have high school and elementary education, but there has been an increase in the number of highly educated migrants. The increase in qualifications in the last two decades has enabled Kosovan migrants to be employed in important sectors and leading positions in the host country.

According to the [23] study, regarding Kosovan migrants in destination countries, 7.57% of the total number of employees have a managerial/supervisory position, 0.9 % work as an administrator, 82.16 % are low-skilled workers, and 4.68 % are salespeople and others. 4.68 %. However, when comparing the composition of employment by sector with earlier periods (two decades ago), some progress can be seen. The primary and secondary sectors have declined sharply from earlier periods, but the low level of professional qualifications of Kosovan migrants remains an obstacle. In the survey conducted with Kosovan migrants from the Municipality of Suhareka, we also find that about half of the migrants have secondary education and about 20% have incomplete primary education [15]. Therefore, this situation causes Kosovan migrants to take on hard work in host societies and to change their occupation. This builds on research on the economic integration of migrants [10] which has postulated that migrants give up a job in their country of origin to take a job with a lower status but higher income in the host country, driven by the motive that the wages in the – wealthier – host country are substantially higher.

In the last decade, some European countries (Germany and Italy) have begun issuing work visas for Kosovan citizens, attracting many young and unemployed Kosovans to migrate, especially to Germany, in search of a better life. To understand the situation of Kosovan migrants before and after migration, this study aims to investigate their socioeconomic status with a focus on employment, the unemployment rate, and satisfaction with income.

### Theoretical framework

It is well established in the literature on migration that the economic outlook in the country of origin is a relevant push factor for migrants while the economic outlook in the destination country is an important pull factor [6, 7]. About two-thirds of Kosovan migrants were unemployed before migrating from Kosovo. This situation has made more and more Kosovan people migrate in search of a better job and a better life. However, the situation is no better for Kosovan migrants who had a temporary, low-wage job in their country of origin. This builds on research on the economic integration of migrants [10], which has postulated that migrants give up a job in their country of origin to take a job with a lower status but a higher income in the host country, driven by the motive that wages in the – wealthier – host country are substantially higher. Low monthly incomes are a driving force for many Kosovan migrants. According to various studies, migrants in the early years of immigration do not have much choice in the job that they perform in the host country, so they quickly integrate into the labour market. The level of employment among men (70 %) is considerably higher than that among women (50 %). This is because – as a consequence of their higher age composition – there are more pensioners among women as well as the fact that more women than men stay at home to bring up a family.

Studies have shown that some groups face a persistent labour market disadvantage, with some non-white immigrants experiencing poorer employment and earning prospects than white immigrants regardless of their education levels and length of stay in the country [11]. As newly arrived immigrants often possess qualifications that they obtained in their origin country that are not directly transferable or are less valued, they may face an initial disadvantage in the labour market due to a deficit of suitable human capital [5]. This disadvantage, unlike the situation in the country

of origin, will reduce as migrants gain experience in the host country's labour market, improve their language skills, and gain new qualifications that are valuable to employers.

Authors [10] presented a U-shaped model in their study of the labour market integration of migrants. According to this model, migrants, shortly after migration, experience downward mobility between the status of their last job before migrating and that of their job after migration. The authors posited that the main reason for this loss of status lies in the imperfect match between the human capital acquired by migrants in their country of origin and the skills required (e.g. qualifications and language skills) on the labour market in the destination country – a labour market with which migrants are moreover not yet sufficiently familiar. Using the latter definition, [12] showed that education-conditioned migrants in the US tend to work at a lower socioeconomic classification than locals. Since [8] it has been known that, in the US, immigrants start with much lower wages than natives with similar characteristics and then slowly catch up with them. Authors [1] showed the same for 15 European countries. The initial wage penalty is often interpreted as the devaluation of the human capital obtained in another country [9]. Over time, immigrants' wages converge to those of natives as immigrants invest in human capital and find jobs with higher earnings or a better fit or jobs in higher-paying industries and occupations. Also, employers over time learn about the true productivity of the immigrants. There is some evidence that immigrants even overtake natives after 10 to 15 years in the US and Canada [8, 22]. The reason could be that immigrants are a self-selected group with potentially higher levels of labour marketability and motivation.

## Methods

The study aims to investigate Kosovan migrants' employment situation, unemployment, and satisfaction with their monthly income before and after migration. It is based on data collected (face to face) from the field using a questionnaire (N=350) conducted with Kosovan migrants living and operating in Switzerland (31 %), Germany (29 %), Italy (16 %), Austria (14 %), and Sweden (9 %). The study was conducted with both genders (36 % female and 64 % male). The age of the respondents was between 18 and 65 years. It was conducted in Kosovo (2019), while Kosovan migrants were visiting Kosovo for summer and

winter holidays. Contact with the respondents (Kosovan migrants) was possible in two ways: a) direct contact with migrants at Pristina International Airport 'Adem Jashari' and b) direct contact at home (in Kosovo). The questionnaire was conducted in the language of the country of origin (Albanian) and the sample was semi-planned. It is worth noting that, out of the total number of planned respondents, seven of the respondents refused to answer for personal reasons. The data were analysed in SPSS.

Table 1 – Descriptive data for the sample of the respondents

Number of respondents	Total, 350
Gender, %	Male – 64 Female – 36
The average age of respondents	37.5 years
Education level, %	Unfinished primary school – 4 Primary school – 36 Secondary school – 47 University – 11 Other – 2
Year of immigration, %	Before 1990 – 8 During 1990 – 49 After 2000 – 43
Destination country,	Switzerland – 31 Germany – 29 Italy – 16 Austria – 14 Sweden – 9

## Measurements

To understand the situation of Kosovan migrants before and after migration, we asked some questions such as 'Were you employed in the country of origin and were you employed in the host country?' The responses were classified as a) employed, b) partially employed, c) unemployed, and d) other. We proceeded with the following question: 'In which economic sector did you work in the country of origin and in which sector do you work in the host country?' The answers were classified as follows: a) education or health, b) public administration, c) agriculture, d) industry, e) construction, f) trade, and g) other. To understand whether the profession had changed after migration, we asked: 'Do you practice the same



profession as in the country of origin?' The possible answers were a) yes, b) no, and c) other. Meanwhile, to understand employed migrants' satisfaction with their monthly income, they were asked: 'How much was the monthly income in the country of origin and how much is it in the host country?' The responses were classified separately for the country of origin and the host. For the country of origin, the classification ranged from less than 100 euros to over 401 euros, while, for the host country, the classification ranged from less than 1000 euro to more than 2001 euros. And, satisfaction with monthly income where answers were classified as: Very, average, little, not at all.

## RESULTS

*Pre-migration situation of migrants.* Until the 1970s, Kosovan society was rural – agrarian and uneducated. After that period, the level of urbanization progressed, large social enterprises were established, which employed large numbers of labourers, and the first public university was opened, expanding the education and health system throughout the country. In this wave of industrialization, many citizens were employed. However, this progressive situation did not continue. After the abolition of Kosovo's autonomous status in 1989, the situation changed drastically to the disadvantage of Kosovan Albanians [13, 14, 16]. At this time, the Albanian population (workforce) was laid off, Albanian schools closed, and the education and health system began to develop in exceptional circumstances (in private homes). Albanians with political backgrounds were persecuted by the Serbian police, and large-scale migration occurred throughout the country. This situation lasted until the liberation of Kosovo (1999). After 1999, although Kosovo was liberated (1999) and independent (2008), the social and economic situation was severe (unemployment was around 45%, and the youth and female unemployment rates were as high as 80%), and the lack of infrastructure, lack of jobs, and high demand for employment led many citizens to migrate. The results show that most Kosovan citizens who migrated were unemployed. According to the findings of the study, 75 % of Kosovan migrants were unemployed before migrating, while only 24 % were employed and 1% reported 'other'. The highest unemployment rate was for women (85 %) and the young age group. Regarding the level of education of immigrants before they migrated, only 11 % had completed university

studies, whereas most of the migrants had secondary education, a lower education level, or other cases.

The worst situation regarding the level of education was for the female gender. About 60 % of the women who migrated had primary education, incomplete primary education, or no level of education. This situation caused Kosovan migrants to take on hard work in the host society and to be unable to choose a better job, and they lived a more difficult life. Differences in the level of employment also exist in the rural-urban context, in which migrants originating from rural areas had lower employment rates than those from cities before migrating. Only 21 % of rural migrants were in employment before migrating, and 77% were unemployed or reported in other cases. Meanwhile, among urban migrants, 36 % were in employment and 64 % were unemployed, meaning that, compared with those from rural areas, migrants originating from urban areas had a slightly better level of employment and living conditions. The differences in the rate of employment and unemployment of migrants before they migrated are also reported by age group: see the table below.

Table 2. Pre-migration employment and unemployment rates, %

	Age			
	18–34	35–64	>65	Total
Yes (employment)	22	28.5	0	24
No (unemployment)	77.5	70.5	100	75
Others	0.5	0.9	0	0.9
Total	100	100	100	100

The highest unemployment rate was for the age group of migrants between 18 and 34 years old (78 %), followed by the age group 35–64 years (71 %). Thus, according to the findings of the study, the unemployment rate for all age groups was very high (75 %). Although 24 % of migrants were in employment before migrating, their income was insecure and insufficient for a stable life. Migrants did not regularly receive their monthly salary from their employer, making it difficult to make a living in one form or another, as most of the migrants interviewed said they 'were in debt every day' because their employer did not give them their monthly salary regularly (monthly). On the other hand, despite being employed (24 %), they received very low wages. The

low monthly wages were not enough to lead a dignified life, so they were forced to migrate in search of a better life.

For migrants who were employed in their country of origin before migrating, 54 % had a monthly income of fewer than 200 euros, while 31% had a monthly income of 201–400 euros and 16% had a monthly income of over 401 euros. With these monthly incomes, it is difficult to cover monthly expenses and to lead a normal life. When we add to this the situation of being a householder with an unresolved housing status or a family member with poor health, the social status of the family deteriorated.

Another feature of Kosovan migrants employed in the country of origin before migrating was the level of income by demographic structure. The monthly income differs by age group; for example, a monthly income of fewer than 100 euros per month dominates the age group 35–64 years (16 %) versus the age group 18–34 years (7.3 %). As one age, one's monthly income increases too. Only 9.7% of this demographic category had a monthly income of over 401 euros, while for the age group 35–64 it was 18.3 %. The increase in the monthly salary with the increase in age is expressed as a result of work experience and professional achievement. A difference in monthly income at work also exists by gender. Female migrants had lower incomes than male migrants before migrating. See the table below.

Table 2 – Monthly income by gender in the country of origin, %

	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
€101–200	38.8	50	40.6
€201–400	31.5	25	30.4
Less than €100	12	20	13.3
Over €401	17.5	5	15.7
Total	100	100	100

Before migrating, 70 % of the female migrants had a monthly income of fewer than 200 euros, while only 5 % had a monthly income of over 401 euros. The cause of this situation is the low level of education for women and social issues. Labor migrants who were highly skilled before migrating enjoyed higher incomes. Significant differences in terms of income were also observed in cities and villages. Migrants from the city (urban areas) who were employed before migrating had higher

incomes, and 65 % of migrants had a monthly income of over 401 euros against 35 % of those from rural areas. In urban areas, in general, the level of education is higher and there are greater job opportunities and higher-paying jobs.

Poor social and economic conditions in the country of origin and the desire for a better life in the host country made Kosovan citizens migrate. To understand what people's monthly income should be to avoid them migrating from their country of origin, the study reveals that citizens' demands are for an above-average wage (the average wage in Kosovo was 374 euros in 2017) Kosovo. With the average wage that Kosovo currently has, there is the possibility of further migration of citizens, especially young people. From the results, we found that 39.5 % of the migrants, to have an average living standard in their country of origin, would have to have an income of 501–800 euros per month, with over 35 % of the migrants declaring a monthly income of over 801 euros and other cases. What is special about the study is that the requirements for the average monthly income between the two genders and by age group are very close. Differences exist based on migrants' qualifications. As migrants' qualifications increase, their demands for higher wages also increase. The results of the study show that 44.8 % of migrants who have completed university studies want to have a monthly salary of over 801 euros. The latter is justified by the fact that this social category has invested in human capital and leads a life with higher standards and thus demands higher pay. Differences in the amount of monthly income also exist in the village-to-town relation. While migrants originating from urban areas claim a monthly income of over 801 euros (over 40%), only about 30% of those from rural areas require an income of over 801 euros. This difference may be due to migrants with real estate originating from the village who can use and thus generate additional income from individual and family real estate. As a result of high unemployment, poverty, poor education, a lack of proper infrastructure, and so on, many citizens, especially young people, have migrated to developed countries in search of a job and a better life for themselves and their families.

*Post-migration situation of migrants.* Although most Kosovan migrants have faced many challenges during the migration process and afterward, many have integrated into the host society, jobs, education, and social life in general. While most of the respondents were unemployed before

migrating, their situation changed after migration, with most now being employed. Of the total number of migrants, 83 % are employed in the host society while only 14 % are unemployed, 1.3% work part-time, and 1% reported another situation. The highest employment rate is represented by the male gender (92 % employed), while 59 % of the female gender is employed. According to a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) study, none of the migrant women with family reunification status are employed compared with 42% of men in this category, and only one-third of women with a work visa are employed compared with more than two-thirds of men of the same status. This underscores the fact that male migrants from Kosovo tend to perform better than female migrants in the labour market and appear to make better use of economic and employment opportunities in their home countries [25]. Regarding employment by age group, there are no significant differences, whereas differences exist according to the level of qualifications of the employed migrants. The level of employment is higher among highly skilled migrants. Despite the lack of professional qualifications or the lack of qualifications in general for migrants, the employment rate is quite high. However, the results show that the majority of Kosovan migrants are employed in heavy work (construction, industry, cleaning and hygienic maintenance of public and private facilities, garden care, driving, etc.). To obtain a real picture of the employment sector of Kosovan migrants in the host society, the study reveals that about one-third of the migrants are employed in the construction sector (30 %), 17% in industry, 12% in trade, 8 % in education and health, 5.3% in public administration, and 27% in various sectors. The main sector of the economy in which Kosovan migrants are employed is construction (30 %), followed by industry and other sectors. A considerable number are also employed in hotels, tourist agencies, and so on, but this sector is not included as a separate sector in this study. Of the total number of employees, 73 % are employed in private enterprises, while 26 % are employed in public institutions and 1% in other entities. A characteristic of the employment of Kosovan migrants is gender representation by economic sectors. About one-third of female migrants (23.9 %) and 3.4 % males are employed in the education and health sector, 11.9 % of female migrants are employed in public administration and 3.4 % males, while in the construction and industry sector the male gender is represented by 55.6 % versus the

female which is represented by 15.2 %. Male migrants are employed in heavier work.

Regarding migrants' workplace conditions, the study analysed the length of working hours, as a very important indicator that is regulated by international norms, in the profession that they are practicing, and the amount of income that they earn. In this respect, we understand that about two-thirds of Kosovan migrants (59.8 %) work for 5–8 hours per day, 32% work for 9–12 hours and 4.3 % work for over 12 hours in the host society. Working for over 8 hours and over 12 hours a day in hard work (construction, industry, etc.) makes life difficult for migrants. As a result of hard work and overtime, many migrants retire early and are in poor health. This is especially true of Kosovan migrants who migrated before and during the 1970 and 1990, who, while trying to help their families in their country of origin, saved money for their basic needs, such as food, housing, clothing, and so on, to send to their families to Kosovo. This situation began to change after 2000. Migrants, especially those of a younger age, place greater importance on food, clothing, modern technologies, and luxury in general. This situation has arisen for many reasons, among the main ones being that most of the migrants have migrated with their families and most of them are employed and generate higher incomes.

Part-time work (1–4 h) is most represented by women (11%), while for men the figure is 2%. The work with overtime is dominated by men with 4.6 % versus women with 3.4 %. Most (70 %) women work for 5 to 8 hours a day, while 56 % of males work for 5 to 8 hours. Male migrants work in heavier jobs and for more hours.

Another important issue is the change of occupations after migration. Various sociological studies have shown that migrants change occupations after migration and in the early years do not choose their occupation but work in whatever job is given to them only to make a living and integrate into the host society. The results show that 86.5 % of Kosovan migrants switched jobs after migration, only 8.1 % have the same occupation (as in the host country) even after they migrated, and 5.3% of migrants practice approximately the same occupation as they had in the country of origin.

One of the factors driving young people to migrate is satisfied with their income in the host society. While the income of Kosovan migrants in the country of origin was small and uncertain, this situation changed positively after migrating to the

host society. Kosovan migrants in the host society have a monthly wage that is 4–5 times higher than in the country of origin, thereby increasing their satisfaction with their monthly income in the host society. The results show that 53.2 % of Kosovan migrants employed in the host country have a monthly income above 2001 euros, 39.3 % have a monthly income of 1001–2000 euros, and 7.6 % have a monthly income of up to 1000 euros per month. The lowest monthly salary in the host country is represented by female migrants (14 % of employees have a salary less than 1000 euros), while the highest salary is represented by male migrants (56 % have a higher salary than 2001 euros per month). Regarding income by age, there are no significant differences, while migrants with higher educational backgrounds have higher incomes.

Kosovan migrants have experienced a long journey towards integration into the host society, facing many different challenges; however, the high level of employment and the creation of better living conditions are clear indications of their success in the host society.

## CONCLUSIONS

The socio-economic crisis in Kosovan society, with the change of political systems and especially the aftermath of the last war in Kosovo (1999), which destroyed family houses, public enterprises, and the country's economy in general, made international migration an unstoppable process. After 1999, public enterprises were privatized and many workers lost their jobs. Many young and unskilled workers, unable to find a job and consequently to have a better life, viewed migration to the developed countries of Europe and beyond as the only solution to find employment and a better life.

In the last decade, Kosovan migrants have been able to migrate more easily, especially to Germany, Italy, and so on, with work visas. The creation of opportunities to migrate with work visas to several European countries has led to a large number of Kosovans migrating and integrating into the host society at the same time. The wave of migration in the last two decades has also been influenced by family migration (family reunification) and the difficult socio-economic situation in

Kosovo. Based on the findings of our study, we can conclude that the unemployment rate for Kosovan migrants before migrating was very high (75 %); thus, it was one of the driving factors of migration. The situation was not good even for migrants who were employed before migrating. They worked long hours per day in poor working conditions, they were not paid regularly by their employer, and they earned low wages. Over 50% of Kosovan migrants had a monthly wage below 200 euros before migrating, lower than Kosovo's average wage (374 euros), and over two-thirds of migrants had a monthly wage below 400 euros per month.

The employment situation for Kosovan migrants improved upon migration to their host country. Accordingly, we can conclude that the majority of Kosovan post-migration migrants are employed (83%) and enjoying a better life than in the country of origin, but in the first years of migration, their life was far from the standards that the locals achieved in the host society.

The study shows that, due to the migration policies applied by these countries, Kosovan migrants have a lower post-migration professional status than before migration, a finding that is consistent with the international literature. Of the total number (24 %) of Kosovan migrants employed before migrating, 86.5 % have changed jobs after migration. However, changing occupation has not decreased their satisfaction with their income; on the contrary, income satisfaction in the host country is high compared with that in the country of origin. After migration, Kosovan migrants receive a monthly income that is about four to five times higher than they had in their country of origin.

The socio-economic situation was not good even for Kosovan migrants employed in Kosovo. Although 24 % of Kosovan migrants were employed before their migration, their monthly income was low, irregular, and insufficient to lead a normal life. This socio-economic situation of migrants improved significantly after migration. Long-term work is characteristic of Kosovan migrants. Post-migration, many Kosovan migrants (about 40 %) work for over 8 hours a day and live a life far beyond the standards set by locals in these host countries. An early study by [26] showed that an increase in professional status was seen only after more than 10 years in the host country.



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